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ABSTRACT

This teacher's manual contains guidelines for using art, poetry, and music to teach U.S. labor history to elementary school students. Students are expected to work in groups, conduct research on an assigned or selected art print, poem, or song that reflects people at work, and give a class presentation that stresses role playing and student viewpoints. The art prints, poetry, and songs need to be carefully chosen to stimulate discussion and writing, and suggestions for each category are given. A final research report is suggested, and a step-by-step research guide for students is provided. (DJC)

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THE ROLE OF LABOR IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

LESSON PLAN

by

Alice Ganz

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[Lan, M.]

Lesson Plan

The Role of Labor in American Society

This lesson plan uses the affective domain to introduce the role of labor through the arts. It makes use of reading and writing across the curriculum, individual learning styles, and cooperative learning techniques.

The approach I have outlined does not translate well to a traditional lesson plan. Much depends upon the interests, talents, experiences, and learning and teaching styles of both students and teachers. I have kept it as flexible as possible, to allow for individual differences. It is my contention that just as individual talents and initiative have been the backbone of American labor, so the individual talent and initiative of America's teachers and students will breathe life into these lessons.

Art

Introduce unit on labor with a field trip to "People at Work," an exhibit of paintings at Hofstra University, in Hempstead, New York, or another such exhibit. If a field trip is not possible, prints may be used in class. Some suggestions of works of art touching on the role of labor include:

Diego Rivera, "Sugar Cane" and his labor murals in the Detroit Institute of Arts

Degas, "Rehearsal in the Foyer of the Opera"

George Caleb Bingham, "The Jolly Flatboatmen in Port"

Asher B. Durand, "The First Harvest"

Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont, "The Capture of a Sperm Whale"

Winslow Homer, "Kissing the Moon"

Charles Curran, "A Breezy Day"

Edward Hopper, "East Side Interior" and "Pennsylvania Coal Town"

Each work of art should be used to stimulate discussion and writing. Role playing and point of view should be stressed. Divide the class into groups of four to six students, giving each group a print of a person or people at work. Groups will assign their members various roles: worker, management, consumer, etc. One member of each group should be a recorder and one an observer. The group's task is to make a presentation to the class on the work of art they were assigned. It will take several class sessions for group work and presentations. Assignment to a group or to a role within a group may be done by the teacher, by the group members, or by student interest in particular works of art or roles. Learning styles could determine whether a student learns best by acting out a role, writing about a painting, participating in a discussion, or watching and listening.

Poetry

Keeping the same groups or forming new ones, assign one or more of the following poems to each cooperative learning group:

Walt Whitman, "I Hear America Singing"

Rudyard Kipling, "The Land"

John Manifold, "Night Piece"

Hart Crane, "The River" (from "the Bridge"

Vachel Lindsay, "Why I Voted the Socialist Ticket"

Robert Frost, "The Tuft of Flowers" and "The Death of the
Hired man"

Louis Untermeyer, "Caliban in the Coal Mines"

Carl Sandburg, "The People, Yes," "Chicago," and "Prayers of
Steel"

Edgar Lee Masters, Spoon River Anthology

Rodolfo Gonzales, "I Am Joaquin"

Working in groups as before, the students will prepare presentations of their poems for the class. Research may be done on the time and place of the poem's setting and the life of the poet, with an emphasis on the role of labor. Roles within each group may vary. They could include readers, writers, researchers, dramatists, artists, recorders, and observers.

Music

Using cooperative learning groups as above, introduce

of labor throughout American history. Here are but a few suggestions:

"I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night"

"John Henry"

"The Erie Canal"

Negro spirituals such as "Go Down, Moses" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot"

Sea chanteys

The help of the music department might be sought for this project, just as the help of the art and English departments might be sought in those above. Group members who sing or play an instrument might have special roles in presentations, but care must be taken to include all group members in every project, not to allow the "stars" to take over and the non-participants to get lost in the crowd.

Research

The above cooperative learning units may stand on their own or be used as an introduction to research undertaken by groups or individual students. Students should be allowed to choose their own topics, either from a list provided by the teacher, or from their own interests sparked by the work described above. A step-by-step guide to the research and writing process is included with this lesson plan. It may be duplicated and used by students. The final research report need not be in written form, but may take the form of an original work of art or music created by the student.

Writing a Research Report

1. Choose a topic that you already know something about and really care about. Brainstorm by yourself or with a friend: List five or more topics and talk about them. Then choose the one topic you really want to work on.
2. Write down everything you already know about your topic.
3. Make a list of at least five questions about your topic, things you don't know and really want to find out. Avoid "yes" or "no" questions.
4. Look for sources of information to answer your questions. These may be interviews with people, observations with your own eyes and ears, books, magazines, or anything else that will help you to answer your questions. Keep a list of all the sources you use. This will be your bibliography.
5. Answer all of your questions. If you cannot find answers to some of the questions, you may be able to get help from the librarian, your teacher, other students, or people in your community.
6. Make a cluster, combining the things you wrote for item 2 (what you already know) and the answers to your questions.

7. Decide on an audience and a purpose for your report. This should help you to decide on the form the report will be in and to focus on that part of the information you have collected which will be most helpful in the report.

8. Brainstorm to choose the best possible lead (opening sentence) for your report.

9. Write your first draft.

10. Read your report aloud to yourself, to your friends, to your class, and to your teacher. Ask for feedback, questions, advice.

11. Revise your report until it sounds just right, both to you and to your audience. Remember that your closing sentence is as important as your first sentence.

12. Proofread your report, and ask for help from others. Use a dictionary to check spelling.